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THE MYSTERY-RELIGIONS AND THEIR INFLUENCE UPON PAUL'S CONCEPTION OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF

Submitted
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THE MYSTERY-RELIGIONS AND THEIR INFLUENCE UPON

PAUL'S CONCEPTION OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF

To analyze the complex of variant religious forces operating in the Graeco-Roman world in the first Christian century and to estimate the relative effect of the Eastern Myserty-cults upon the early development of Christianity is an almost impossible task. Yet it is a task, the accomplishment of which is fundamentally essential to an adequate and comprehensive knowledge of the development of Christianity up to and including the time of the Apostle Paul.

Introduction

This complex is composed of a variety of religious moments closely related to each other; it involves the question of the nature of these so-called Mystery-Religions of the Graeco-Roman world, of the pristine nature of Christianity and finding the contribution and influence, if any, that Christianity, as represented by Paul, may have received from these religious forces.

In order to understand properly the rise and rapid spread of the Mystery-cults in the Graeco-Roman world and their conflict with Christianity, we must take into account the political, social and religious history of the Mediterranean world during the period of time from the invasion of the East by Alexander the Great in 334 B.C. until the Roman Empire in the first Christian century. We must also keep in mind the means by which the new order, inaugurated by Alexander, arose

out of the old order which had dominated the peoples of the Eastern Mediterranean.

This period is of consuming interest to the student of the history of religion. During these centuries the vital forces of old and ripe civilizations were brought to a focus. New ideas were implanted in human society which have been productive of much good and evil for all subsequent history. During these centuries we witness the downfall of the most wonderful and fruitful of the political experiments of ancient history - the polis. Rapprochment between East and West such as has never since been achieved was then effected under the great Macedonian leaders. For the first time history witnesses the political supremacy of the West over the East.

Of religious importance we note the growth and influence of the Jewish Diaspora, the chief path-finder for Christianity and what to us is of special importance the phenominal meteor-like rise and spread of the Oriental Mystery-Religions thruout the Mediterranean world. Later with the rise of Christianity we see these cults come to grapple for supremacy and eventually succumb to religion set forth by the lowly Nazarene.

This period witnessed the rise of internationalism and nationalism. This was made possible by the liberal policy adopted by Alexander the Great toward subject nationalities. Oriental re-

ligions aimed also at internationalism and achieved it to a degree unknown hitherto or since, so that internationalism prevailed in the world for about two millennia.

Thruout this long period, but particularly in the first Christian centuries, religious interests occupied the dominant place in the lives of men and women who made the history of the Graeco-Roman world, with the result that for the ensuing thousand years, down to 1300 A.D., the "basis of human organization is the religious motive, and human society is ecclesiastical in its primary inspiration."[1] Men were continually in quest of a religion of redemption with an adequate theology and a satisfying and stimulating worship. To follow man in his religious development from "soil to soul" has given to the world the various religious systems. The more these systems met their religious satisfactions the more widespread they became. In the Graeco-Roman world we will see how these various national religious streams became united and what was their possible effect and influence upon Paul's conception of Christianity.

The outbreak and universal prevalence of superstition thruout the Graeco-Roman world is another index of its religious interest. Methods of approach to deity formerly looked upon as

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1. Angus, The Mystery-Religions and Christianity, p. 4.

not respectable and popular beliefs that had been kept under during the halcyon days of state-religion once more came into vogue. The breaking up of the priestly colleges of Mesopotamia by Alexander and the opening up of Egypt, thru Alexandria, was the first marked impetus to the spread of superstition. This began with the lower classes and gradually penetrated the higher classes until under the Empire it became universal.

"Soon neither important nor small matters were undertaken without consulting the astrologer. His pervisions were sought not only in regard to great public events like the conduct of a war, the founding of a city, or accession of a ruler, not only in case of a marriage, a journey, or a change of domicile; but the most trifling acts of every day life were gravely submitted to his sagacity."[1]

Again, the religious spirit of the age was marked by an aggressive religious propoganda such as no other age has surpassed. Each religion in the Roman world became a missionary religion; the humblest member was obliged and privileged to enlarge its prestige and increase its adherents. The sailor, soldier and merchant in conjunction with his major activities equally zealously exchanged spiritual wares. That this was done with considerable success we know

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1. Cumont, Oriental Religions, tr. p. 165.

from the diffusion of the Mystery-cults from foreign lands into the Graeco-Roman world. The rapid and amazing dissemination of Syrian cults and especially of Mithraism thrucut the West remains one of the outstanding phenomena of religious propaganda.

Let us consider the antecedents of this religious world into which Oriental cults rushed like an irresistible tide; what were the conditions which influenced and informed the spirit of this period? What were the crises thru whihh the Mediterranean nations passed which drove them loose from their old moorings; in what respects the Greek and the Roman and the Jew and the Oriental reacted upon one another. We may summarize the decisive historic moments which opened the way for the Oriental religions and Christianity thus:[1]

1. Bankruptcy of Greek Religion and Disintegrating Influence of Greek Philosophy.

The gods of the Greek religion were clearly defined personalities, having the passions like unto man and not over ethical. The morals of the Greek gods did not keep pace with the developing ethical consciousness of the Hellenes. The thinkers of the day never hesitated to apply relentlessly any truth at whatever cost to their religion or institutions or mental comfort. A fatal blow was thus struck at poly-

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1. Angus, op. cit., pp. 6-10.

theism. Guided by the intuition that the Divine is one, both pillars of the temple of old Hellenic religion - polytheism and anthropomorphism - finally fell before the assault of criticism. The myths of their gods and goddesses became repulsive and were repudiated. There was a growing demand that religion must be rational and also satisfy the highest moral ideals. This the Olympian gods could not meet in the minds of inquiring people. The national character of the Greek religion disappeared and the Greeks began to look with favorable regard upon the religions coming from the East. Hence from the fourth century B.C. onwards, Oriental cults gained access into Greece.

Greek religion was doomed with the fall of the polis which had given it its life and form. Man now found himself living a sensitive individual life. More than ever before he now needed help for the dark things of human life and destiny. To the common man philosophy had failed and given way to the mystic religions of Redemption. It was this Oriental spirit that was completed in the triumph of Christianity. The Greek, steeped in Hellenistic-Oriental theology, went forth to hellenize the East and West after he had witnessed the wreck of his city-state, after he had himself become conscious of spiritual needs which could be satisfied only by religions of a more emotional and individual character.

In their last genuinely Greek philosopher they furnished a tutor to Philip's son: for their talents Alexander opened a boundless

vista, and they supplied a lingua franca for the widely scattered cult-brotherhoods of the Mystery-Religions and the house-churches of early Christianity.

The appearance of Alexander the Great forms a turning-point in the history of the race. He made all things new. Beside his great military exploits and introducing new political systems, we remember him principally as the instigator of that comprehensive cosmopolitianism which reached its apogee in the Roman Empire. He was the first of ancient conquerors by whom the conquered were conceded any rights. He treated Greek and Macedonian alike; this resulted in a mixing of the East and West. Exclusivism and particularism of the ancient world were broken up for all time to come. All nationalities mingled, systems of thought and religion were exchanged, commercial activities between nations grew and flourished.

In order to carry on in a language understood by all, the spread of the Koine or common Greek tongue was effected. This helped the cause of religious propaganda. Heretofore each separate city-state had its own patois which in most cases was distinct from its neighbor a couple of leagues distant as are Spanish and Italian.

Theocrasia, or religious Syncretism, on a stupendous scale was an immediate outcome of Alexander's intermingling of races. Every

Mystery-Religion was syncretistic. This religious syncretism was abetted by the almost complete absence of intolerance, by the universal demand for Saviour-gods, by the medium of a common tongue, and by that mixture of races such as could be found today only in the United States. Alexander's general policy of treating all nations as politically equal conduced equality of deities. This syncretistic tendency prepared the way for the long sway of the Oriental cults over the West and for the success of Christianity itself.

In order to further cement the new complex nation Alexander adopted the Oriental custom of anotheosis. With this came the idea of divine right of kings which engaged the minds of both pagan and Christian theologians for many hundreds of years. This political device of assertion of divinity on the part of Alexander proved advantageous politically but disastrous to morality and religion. This idea, however, furthered the idea of monotheism toward which Greek philosophy had been tending. It made men think on the question, if the world was united under one ruler, why should not men believe in the rule of one God?[1]

2. The Appearance of the Jews in World-History.

The appearance of the Jews on the horizon of universal world-history has had vast consequences for the history of religion in

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1. Material for this heading from Angus, op. cit., pp. 10-22.

antiquity and today. This obstinate people with a thirst for righteousness and a passion for monotheism, stepped out of its long seclusion to deliver its perennial message and to realize its own prophetic ideals. In the Greek period it began its long missionary career, which did not abate until in the second Christian century. The Law of Judaism helped to conserve the national consciousness of Israel in the face of the disintegrating tendencies of Hellenism. In 333 B.C. they were vassals to Alexander and he conciliated their stubborness. Alexander confered equal municipal rights on them with the Macedonians and Egyptians when he transported some of the Jews to Alexandria in 331. This accelerated migration which was mostly westward and voluntary. In their contact with the West and with Hellenism they did not succumb, but were offected profoundly as they in turn profoundly left their impress on the Hellens. They were missionaries to all nations and promoted the growth of monotheism. The Septuagint in the <u>lingua franca</u> made pagans familiar with a holy book superior to anything that any other religion could offer. The Jews lived a sober life amid the looser morals of paganism, carried on a life aimed at spiritual living, all of which produced fruit. Multitudes of converts and adherents were won to Judaism. Their task of proselyting was facilitated by the religious destitution of the Western peoples, the divorce between the religion of the State and that of the citizens, the taste for Oriental cults which seized

the Greek world in the days of Alexander and the Roman world in the Second Punic War. The success of their propaganda is due to three main causes - first, Judaism always presented its most attractive side to paganism; secondly, it pursued the practical aim of securing a moral and happy life; thirdly, it profited by the general trend toward Oriental faiths in monotheism in discovering a cathartic for sin and in the promise of blessedness.

There was a momentous attempt to fuse Greek philosophy and Hebrew revelation at Alexandria, of which the outstanding figure, but not at first, was Philo. The Jews whetted the appetite for Oriental faiths, while Judaeo-Hellenism fostered that religious syncretism in which the Oriental cults throve. In voluntary associations for the personal cultivation of personal religion, in appointed days of worship, in enthusiastic missionary impulse, in proclaiming the forgiveness of sins and offering the means of purification, in teaching the habit of prayer, in furnishing sacraments and holding out future rewards, in serving as a nexus between the East and West, Judaism marched in line with the Mystery-Religions.[1]

3. The Romans in Contact with the East.

Rome became acquainted with Greek civilization in Magna Gracia from 281 B.C. onward, and with the victories of Thermopylae and

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1. Material for this heading from Angus, op. cit., pp. 22-30.

Magnesia forced Antiochus of Syria to yield the hegemony in the Greek world to Rome.

The Roman religion was that of a practical, unimaginative and patriotic people, fostering domestic and civic virtues, and adapted to an agricultural society but continually being overcome by ceremonial and elaborated by foreign accretions. It was essentially a family religion. Each family constituted a little church, on the religion of which that of the State was modelled. What was initially its strength - its intimate connection with the political life - became its weakness on the degradation of religion into a part of the political machinery.

The great crisis in Rome's religion began during the Hannibalic Wars, which proved more disastrous to Roman religion and morality than the Peloponnesian War had been to Hellas. In these dark times of terror and distress the state religion offered no remedy. Religious interests and piety were buried under Greek culture, political interests and self-aggrandizement. Henceforth the religion of the State and that of the people go their own ways. This State religion of the educated classes became cold, formalistic and an instrument of government in the hands of the nobility. Its observances were very perfunctory, its ceremonies often neglected and those who were entrusted with its administration, while recognizing its social value,

no longer believed in it. The learned were skeptical about the value of the official religion.

But the common people, having lost faith in their ancestral gods, looked toward the East for the satisfaction of their yearnings. Popular religion, so long suppressed by the Republic, now welled up in an overflowing flood of superstition. It revealed itself in a strong desire to satisfy personal needs without reference to the State, in a new sense of sin which called for atonement, in a demand for union with the deity, which could then be accomplished only by the Mystery-Religions.

It was during the stress of the Second Punic War that the Senate was compelled to recognize the restlessness of the people and accede to their demands for admittance and worship of these growing popular foreign cults. So in 205, on advice of the Sibylline books - the black monolith of the Magna Mater from Pessinus was officially brought into Rome and with it came the orgiastic and enervating Oriental worship. The Great Mother won her way to popular favor immediately and her worship whetted the appetite of the Romans for emotional cults. Foreign soldiers, officials, merchants, slaves and travelers from the East became propogandists to Roman masters of these Oriental cults.

Now we have a situation in Rome like what we found in Greece of a century and a half before, a loss of faith in their national religion, while their faith in themselves increased. The Romans were in a worse position than the Greeks, since their religion made no appeal to the imagination by a rich mythology nor to the aesthetic taste by a pantheon of lovely anthropomorphic divinities. The ignorant turned to superstitions of foreign cults; the learned to foreign philosophies. In personal necessities men fled to strange gods.

Gradually the Oriental mysticism and emotionalism of the religions of the lower classes gained official entry, even against the liking of the governing class. Political confusion and the increasing religious restlessness of the masses hastened the collapse of the Roman religion. Rome had gained the whole world and lost her own soul.

The State religion was degraded to a menial of politics, the educated were filled with the spirit of unbelief, or of skepticism, the masses were serving foreign gods or sunk in superstition.

The people worn out by wars longed for peace, and it was during the Pax Romana, the first settled peace since the days of Alexander's conquests, that we find a general revival of religion among the people. The rulers, seeing a chance to make their position secure, took the title of Saviours of the people, sons of the Divine, Protectors of the human race. Augustus first took advantage of this and in 13 B.C. took

the title Pontifex Maximus. Every effort during these times was being put forth to find new religious supports and new objects of faith. Thus the religious syncretism, inaugurated by Alexander, was increased. Men were in search for a cleansing and expiation from sin, yet Rome had no redemption-religion to offer so it was to the Mystery-cults that the people turned because they gave them satisfaction.

The rise of the empire promoted the growth of monotheism because of the close relation between the form of religion and polity. One supreme earthly ruler made men think naturally of one Supreme Being in the universe. The empire broke down the racial and national and linguistic barriers, thus promoting the idea of a common humanity, and it should be remembered that it was to man as man that the Mystery-Religions and Christianity appealed. The people, under the care of the empire, had time to devote to cultivate their personal interests to which the private religious associations of the Mystery-Religions and Christianity appealed. The general drift of the imperial era was toward Oriental ways. The empire thus brought the ancient world into a condition which made it a fertile soil for Eastern faiths.[1]

We have been alluding to the Mystery-Religions. Now we shall discuss the principal Oriental cults in detail and see what

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1. Material for this heading from Angus, op. cit., pp. 30-38.

they were and why they so successfully meet the need of the world at this time. Then we shall endeavor to see whether these Mystery-Religions had any influence on Paul's conception of Christian belief.

Sources of our Information.

In the main our sources of information are from fragmentary remains in literature, art and those articles which archeologists have uncovered for us. The few extant literary remains dealing with the Mysteries are scattered references, verses of poetry, fragments of hymns and prayers, mutilated inscriptions, damaged papyri, cult emblems, base reliefs, frescoes, painted vases, ruined chapels and temples. Perhaps no loss caused by the general wreck of ancient literature has been more disastrous than that of the liturgic books of paganism. A few mystic formulas quoted incidentally by pagan or Christian authors and a few fragments of hymns in honor of the gods are practically all that escaped destruction. To know what these lost rituals were we must turn to their initiations contained in choruses of tragedies, to parodies made by comic authors, or look up in books of magic the plagarisms that the writers of incantations may have committed, yet all this gives us only a dim reflection of the actual religious ceremonies.[1]

Term "Mystery" defined.

What do we mean by the term "Mystery" when we speak of Mystery-Religions which swept and captivated the Graeco-

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1. For material in this paragraph compare Cumont, The Oriental Religion in Roman Paganism, pp. 11-13. Angus, S., The Mystery-Religions and Christianity, pp. 40-41.

Roman world? "A mystery meant a spiritual process of initiation, which was, indeed necessarily a secret to those who had not yet experienced it, but had nothing in itself 'mysterious' beyond what inheres today to the process in any Christian 'revival', which is the nearest analogy to the Greek mystery. It is only 'mysterious' in the sense that it cannot be expressed, any more than the sexual embrace can be expressed in words, but can only be known by experience. Aristotle was careful to point out in an extant fragment that what was gained in the Mysteries was not instruction but impressions and emotions."[1]

Much confusion on this subject is due to the misunderstanding of this word "mysteries". We are expressly told that Greek mysteries consisted of things done or acted, and sentences pronounced (ta-dromena Kai ta legomena).[2]

From this we see that action forms the principal part of these religions rather than the imparting of some secret doctrine. In Hellenistic usage the terms to mysterion and far more frequently musteria describe a secret cult. Initiation into this cult presupposes a course of special preparation. It was a sacrilege for an initiate to divulge anything that he had seen, heard, or experienced in the solemn esoteric ritual.[3]

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1. Haverlock, Ellis, The Dance of Life. pp. 241-242
2. Fairbanks, A., Handbook of Greek Religion. p. 131
3. Hastings, E.R.E. Vol. lx, p. 72

The mysteries were a secret worship to which only the privileged persons were admitted, a ritual of purification or other preliminary probation being required before mmnesis, and the mystic ceremony being so important itself and so perilous that a hierophant was needed to guide the catechumen aright.[1]

What is a Mystery-Religion.

The countries from which these Mystery-Religions came were Egypt, Persia, Syria and Greece; with all of them there were certain features that were common. These we shall enumerate.

(1) "A mystery religion was a religion of symbolism, which thru myth and allegory, iconic representations, blazing lights and dense darkness, liturgies and sacramental acts, and suggestions quickened the intuitions of the heart, and provoked in the initiate a mystical experience conducing to paligenesia (regeneration)."[2] The elements of symbolism are often unintelligible and repulsive to us, but thru them men were blindly grasping for reality and truth. This regeneration was effected thru lustrations of water and thru blood baths and thru a communion meal of cake or meat, and also by a sacred drink. After the way was once opened up between the votary and the deity, then followed enlightenment, beholding of an epiphany of the deity.[3] The two factors

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1. Farnell, C. R., Cults of the Greek States, Vol. 111, p. 130
2. Angus, S., The Mystery-Religions and Christianity, p. 45
   Cf. Willoughby, op. cit., p. 280
3. Hastings E.R.E. Vol. lx, p. 82

which in particular abetted the symbolism of the Mysteries were materialistic pantheism or divine immanence, and allegorical interpretation.[1]

(2) "Mystery religion was a redemption which professed to remove estrangement between God and man, to procure forgiveness of sins and to furnish mediation between man and God. To accomplish this the apparatus of every Mystery was the means of purification, a formulae of access to God and an acclamation of confidence and victory."[2] The people felt themselves the helpless victims of a capricious Father and Fortune. Magic had a terror for them, a new sense of sin brought in from the Orient oppressed them, the uncertainty of the unknown after death, all these were practical things from which the people sought escape and the preachers of the Mysteries professed to be able to impart that which would give them their desire."[3] "Communion then with some saving deity, was the end of all practice of mysteries."[4]

(3) The Mystery-Religions were systems of Gnosis. They professed to satisfy the desire for the knowledge of God. Every Mystery imparted a 'secret' knowledge of the life of the deity and the means of union with him. This mystic communion related the worshipper with the divinity but not in any special bond of union between individuals who were initiated, at least in the case of the

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1. Angus, op. cit., p. 47
2. Ibid., p. 50
3. Hastings, J., art W. Ward Fowler, Roman Religion, Vol. 10, p. 839
4. Hastings, J., E.R.E. Vol. lx, p. 82, Cf. Willoughby, op. cit., p. 273

State religions.[1] This logos or secret communication made to the initiates was not a profound esoteric philosophical statement but an explanation of a divine name, or a peculiar story, explaining the sacred things which they had been shown in the last stages of initiation.[2]

(4) A Mystery-Religion was a Sacramental Drama which appealed primarily to the emotions and aimed at producing psychic and mystic effects by which the neophyte might experience the exaltation of a new life. The idea was to work up the emotions by these visual experiences and not to give formulated doctrines.[3] The religious dramas showed before them the story of the struggle, suffering, victory of their deity, the travail of nature in which life ultimately triumphs over death, and joy is born of pain. This was impressed on the beholder by a solemn mimic representation. Cumont says about these emotions that were aroused in the initiate, "they refined and exalted the psychic life and gave to it almost supernatural intensity such as the ancient world had never before known.... Antiquity expired and a new era was born."[4]

(5) The Mysteries were eschatological religions having to do with interests and issues of life and death.[5] The emotions were not simply a temporary satisfaction; the initiate must have read in them

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1. Farnell, L. R., op. cit., p. 131
2. Ibid., p. 131
3. Case, S. J., Ibid., p. 291
4. Cumont, Oriental Religion in Roman Paganism, p. 45
5. Angus, S., op. cit., p. 63

some divine meaning as a basis for his confidence in that blessed immortality.[1] The idea of death and rebirth runs right thru the mystery religions.[2] In the rites the initiate regarded it as death to sin and a rebirth to righteousness, the carnal man was buried and the spiritual man was born. There is a real connection both verbal and substantive between death (teleutan) and initiation (teleisthai). The candidate for initiation is termed by Firmicus Maternus "the man who is about to die."[3]

The teaching of the Mystery-Religions of death to sin and a rebirth to righteousness may easily have had some influence on Paul in his presentation of the Christian belief. This idea of regeneration was a more prominent teaching in the Mystery-Religions than in the teachings of Judaism.

In the Greek religions there was plenty to satisfy when life was joyous but nothing to light into the world beyond, and it was this latter food for yearning humanity that the Mystery-Religions gave. The inscriptions on the tombs such as "Reborn for eternity" show the confidence their religion gave them concerning after life. The vague beliefs in this regard were transformed into a firm, well-defined form of happiness.[4]

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1. Case. S. J., op. cit., p. 292
2. Moore, G. F., op. cit., p. 443
3. Halliday, W. R., The Pagan Background of Early Christianity, p. 242
4. Cumong, op. cit., p. 43

(6) A Mystery Religion was a personal religion to which membership was open not by the accident of birth but by a religious rebirth.[1] Speaking of those eligible to the greatest of all the Mystery-Religions, viz., Eleusinian, Moore says, "This privilege was extended not only to Athenian citizens but to all Greeks without distinction of city or race; women as well as men were eligible, even minors and slaves."[2] With the Mystery-Religions religion ceased to be connected with the State, and became universal. Religion now became a personal obligation and not one of duty to the public.[3] Farnell says, "this communication was not a convention into which an individual found himself born, but it was a free act of the individual's choice.[4]

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1. Angus, S. op. cit., p. 65
2. Moore, G. F., op. cit., p. 451
3. Cumont, op. cit., p. 44
4. Farnell, L. H., op. cit., p. 155

(7) A Mystery-Religion, as a personal religion, presents another side, "which is the necessary complement of an individualistic religion; that is, it takes on the character of a cosmic religion.... This cosmic interest - the craving of a man for order within, as without - was one of the most prominent notes in the Hellenistic age, not only in the Mysteries but in the philosophies, and in Christian theology, which was obliged to include cosmological speculation in its Christianity."[1] This widening of the peoples' horizon was due to a complex situation which engulfed them all about the same time. Here-to-fore the people lived in the narrow confines of the State. Now thru emigration and immigration of these people in the pursuit of wealth, knowledge, colonization and travel their mental horizen was widened.[2] The prolonged struggle with Hannibal formed a turning-point in the history of the Roman people and, therefore, of Roman religion.[3] With it came pestilence, slaughter, economically crushing situations under which the strong moral fiber of the Romans was giving way. The missionary propoganda of the cults of Oriental religions gave these people a vision beyond their family, clan and state affiliations to that of world speculation.[4] The priests of these Oriental cults were scholars and with them came the study and introduction of astronomy, medicine, philosophy, mathematics and the nature of man.[5] In these studies man learned how he was related to the cosmos, the harmony of universal laws and how man participated in the whole universe. The doctrines had an

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1. Angus, S., op. cit., pp. 67-68
2. Moore, G. F., op. cit., Cf. Willoughby, op. cit., pp. 264-267, 281
3. Hastings, J., art. by Wardo Fowler, op. cit., pp. 834-835
4. Soper, D. E., The Religion of Mankind, p. 128
5. Cumont, op. cit., p. 31

intellectual attraction and they offered an apparently rational and complete account of the universe which served as an explanation to the 'why' and 'how' of things that were likely to perplex ordinary man.[1]

Why some religions were mysteries.

A rightful question to ask is whether all the religions of the Graeco-Roman world were mystery religions and why were some called mystery religions? In this period not all the religions extant were valid mystery religions. It was only those religions of an Oriental origin that were called Mysteries. In the mystery religions the god or deified spirit was considered so sacred or dangerous that it was impossible to come to know the deified being directly without some special preparation. Farnell says, "it seems in some cases the religious tabu was more dangerous than in others, the sacred object or ground was charged with a more perilous religious current; thus the statue of Artemis at Pellene was so sacred that it blasted the eyes of all the lookers. In such cases where madness or ill health might result in a rash handling or entrance, it was natural to resort to preliminary ceremonies, sacrifices of purification, whereby the body and soul should be prepared specifically to meet the danger of rapport with divinity."[2]

Besides these rites of initiation the devotees took part in a religious dancing as we learn from Lucian who says, "that no mystery was celebrated without dancing (De Salat. 15) which means it was in some sense a religious drama.[3]

Origin of the Mystery Religions.

The Mystery-Religions were lowly and simple in their origin. They arose from the observation of the patent facts of recurring

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1. Halliday, W. R., op. cit., p. 240
2. Farnell, L. R., op. cit., p. 133
3. Ency. Brit., 11th ed. Vol. XIX, p. 118

death and subsequent rebirth in nature, and from the attempt to see in these the alternations of winter and spring, decay and generation, sunset and a symbol of the life and hope of man and a replica of the divine life, which in primitive thot was conceived merely as the all-vitalizing energy resident in nature. These mysteries consisted in secret rites in honor of certain divinities which represented the drama of life, vegetable and animal, annually failing and renewing. Their origin belongs to a remote period of civilization which was pastoral rather than agricultural. The home of these ancient Mysteries was the wild plateau of Phrygia with its emotionalism, and Thrace, the homeland of the Dionysiac-Orphic Mysteries. These have exercised an enormous influence in the religious history of Europe. At a very early period the Phrygians came from Thrace and mingled with the old Anatolian races, they adopted the vague deities of their new country by identifying them with their own, after the habit of pagan nations.[1]

Four periods in their development.

In the development of the Mysteries we note a development from their earliest period of naturalism to their popularity and imperial recognition in the Roman Empire. (1) There was a time when the Mysteries, in their crudest form were not 'mysteries' for initiates only, but were the religion of a whole pastoral or primitive people. (2) There was a second period when this primitive religion, with necessary modifications, was the religion of the lower stratum of population which adhered to the customs of the auto-chthons. This lower stratum would be the aborigines who survived

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1. Angus, S., op. cit., p. 43, Cumont, op. cit., p. 48

the successive waves of conquests. (3) A period during which the Mysteries were the concern of private religious associations, which might be dated from the first introduction of Orphic cults into the Greek world until the reign of Caligula. These Thiasoi or sodalitates, found their chief religious activity in small brotherhoods. During this period they attracted, on the whole, the lower orders and the foreign population. They were legally on the footing of religious licitae. (4) The imperial period. Altho Augustus and Tiberius favored the cult of the Great Mother, the Phyrgian goddess, which was the first Oriental religion adopted by the Romans[1], they were not well disposed toward all Oriental religions. "After the establishment of the empire the distrust of Cybele and Attis gave way to marked favor and the original restrictions were removed. Thereafter Romans chosen for archigalli and the holidays of the Phrygian deities were solemnly and officially celebrated in Italy with more pomp than at Pessinus. Emperor Claudius was the author of this change. His predecessor, Caligula, authorized the worship of Isis.[2] From this and more particularly from the ascension of the Flavian emperors, the Oriental religions came into universal favor until under the Syrian emperors, they were elevated to rank of State religions. What were once local private cults now became universal religions, only that men were not borni into them but entered by an initiation or rebirth.[3]

The Mystery-Religions were of various kinds and present immense varieties in detail and emphasis but in a general way we may analyse these cults into three stages which have to do with the candidacy for membership, reception into the religious brotherhood and

Three stages of a Mystery Religion.

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1. Cumont, op. cit., p. 46
2. Ibid., p. 55
3. Angus, S., op. cit., p. 44

the privileges and blessings resultant therefrom. We should note that some of these cults were under the auspicis of the State religions; such were the Eleusinian Mysteries of Athens. Others had no State recognition and were celebrated in secret associations by individuals. To this latter class belong the Orphic mysteries. Some of these centered about a male and others a female divinity. The Mysteries of Mithras centered around a male, those of Cybele and Isis around a female.[1]

The three stages common to the Mystery religions are:

(1) Preparation and Probation,
(2) Initiation and Communion;
(3) Blessedness and Salvation.

(1) Preparation and Probation.

If a candidate was not guilty of blood-shed he could be received as eligible for initiation. He was called at this point a neophyte and was conducted thru the complete initiation by a hierophant. The candidate underwent a period of fasting, ritualistic purification, discipline and instruction. All this was given under the command that it be kept secret by the candidate and never be divulged. This was carried out so perfectly that even today we are not sure of the exact meaning of the Mysteries.

These preliminaries having been finished, the candidate was then ready for the initiations proper. Now an auriclar confession was heard from the candidate to the hierophyte, who acted as a representative of the Mystery-god. Now the mystae were ready for the cleansing by water lustrations or water baptisms. We also hear of the spectacular taurobolium, or (blood-of-bull-baptism);

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1. Hastings, J., Dictionary of Apostolic Church, Vol. 11, p. 51

individual sacrifices of pigs, lambs or any animal or bird sacred to the cult were made. Ascetic demands were made, such as prolonged fasts, absolute continence, severe bodily mutilations, painful flagellations, pilgrimages, contributions to the church funds. Sometimes at this point a new name was given to the candidate.[1]

2. Initiations and Communion. From this point on we are not very certain of all that took place because the curtain of secrecy was drawn on the following activities of the cult. However, from various fragmentary sources we can reconstruct a probable program of what followed. The initiation consisted principally of 'things exhibited', 'acts done', and 'things said'. It is improbable that any elaborate dogmatic system of esoteric doctrine was taught the initiate but rather that he received impressions. His instruction consisted in how to conduct himself during the initiations, the pass-word and possibly some pledge by which he swore allegiance to his deity. To the initiates the approach to the sacrament was serious since he believed thru it he became a new creature and passed from death into life. This was signified thru the act of emerging from a blood-bath, eating a sacred meal, drinking the sacred drink or receiving a mark on his forehead. Closely allied and common to all the Mysteries was the faith in communion, or identification with the god. This took place in various ways. Thru ecstasy and enthusiasm he induced a high pitch of emotionalism and thus made contact with his deity. This contact became so intimate as to pass into identity with the deity. In this we see how the Mysteries were conducive to Mysticism. This communion with god gave eventually the conception of deifi-

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1. Angus, S., op. cit., pp. 76-91

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cation, demortalizing, or Apotheosis. (The mystes of Attis became himself Attis.)[1] The mystes of Attis and Osiris believed that they participated in the resurrection of their tutelar and so became Attis or Osiris.

Sacred meals played an important part in accomplishing the union with the deity. This meal was either of bread, water, flesh or fruit of the vine. In the early stages of this idea the devotee thot that by eating his totem or sacrifice he was feeding on his god. But in the Mysteries this crude idea had given way to the meal served as a token of communion of the Mystery-saints forming the main bond of brotherhood among the cult members. It would be possibly going too far to ascribe a highly spiritual or symbolic efficacy to the Mystery-sacrament.[2]

3. Blessedness and Salvation.

To those who had gone thru the previous rites of initiation there was in store the highest and most prized stage of initiation; it was the sight of the sacred images representing the god. On these he was allowed to gaze transfixed in awe and wonder. It was an act of faith that the deity was present to grant a theophany, and a great importance was attached to the vision.

To induce results at this stage of initiation, fastings and suggestions from the priests were resorted to so that in this emotional state the devotee would receive this epopteia. It is possible that the hierophants had ways of assisting the unpromising candidates, so that robed acolytes or statues sometimes did duty for deity. The most explicit testimony of these visions is given by Proclus, "In all these initiations and Mysteries the gods reveal

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1. Angus, S., op. cit., pp. 91-110
2. Angus, S., Ibid., pp. 110-134

many forms of themselves, and manifest themselves changing their modes of apparition. There issues from them a light, sometimes formless, sometimes in human shape, and again transmuted into other shapes."[1]

These Mystery-Religions eventually had a great hold on the people because of the blessedness and salvation they promised. The salvation imparted, embraced deliverances from all the ills that flesh is heir to in life and eventually from the gloom and uncertainty of death. Initiation made all the difference between the saved and the unsaved. "In the Hymn-to-Demeter the Goddess mother asserts; 'Happy is he of men on earth who has seen those Mysteries; but the unitiated who has no part in these holy things, cannot, when dead and down in the murky gloom, have like portion of such blessings."[2]

Our purpose now is to follow our general statements and definitions about the Mystery-Religions with a brief description of the principal Mystery-Religions extant in the Greek-Roman world at the time of the development of early Christianity. In this brief sketch we shall tell something of their origin, their development, their claims, and the myth upon which they were founded. Some of the best known cults are those of Demeter and Dionysus in Greece and Thrace; Cybele and Attis in Phrygia, ... Isis, Osiris and Serapis in Egypt, and Iasura the Syrian Goddess, and finally Mithra in Persia. Apart from the Demeter cult which had become especially localized at Eleusis, these religions often traveled far from their native land, and followed the current of syncretistic life on the Graeco-Roman

Brief outline of the principal Mystery-Religions.

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1. Angus, op. cit., p. 136
2. Angus, Ibid., pp. 137-143. Quotation Ibid., p. 140

times. With the exception of Mithraism they were located in various places about the Mediterranean world a century or more before the opening of our era.[1]

Eleusinian Mystery.

Among these cults none was more favorably known in the first century of the Christian era than the Eleusinian mysteries. This mystery existed for at least a thousand years[2] and came from an Egyptian importation, a theory accepted a generation ago by Curtis and which seems to be supported by archeological finds in the necropolis of Eleusis in 1898.[3]

Since this mystery has to do with Demeter, the goddess of vegetable fertility, it is supposed that at first this mystery was of an agragarian society, and when Greece was overran with warlike tribes from the north, the local clans kept to themselves the secret proceedings on which, as they supposed, the fertility of the land depended. By degrees the old vegetation ritual of Eleusis was dragged into the current of the anthropomorphic religion of Greece.[4]

The seat of this religion is in the little town of Eleusis on the fertile Eharian plain a few miles from Athens. Here in prehistoric times the cereal goddess, Demeter, was worshiped by this agrarian community. The Homeric <u>Hymn to Demeter</u> gives the earliest record of this Mystery. In poetry it takes over the main events of the mythology of Eleusis and works it into artistic form. In the seventh century Eleusis was probably annexed to Attica[5]

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1. Case, S.J., op. cit., p. 74. Cf. Hatch, E., <u>Influence of Greek Ideas and Usage upon the Christian Church</u>. Ed. A. M. Fairbrain. p. 284
2. Hastings, J., Dict. of Apostolic Church, p. 51.
3. Farnell, L. R., op. cit., p. 141. Cf. Hatch, J., op. cit., pp. 284-288
4. Hastings, J., E.R.E. Vol. VI, p. 409; Ibid., Vol. IX, p. 78
5. Moore, G. F., op. cit., p. 451

and the mystery religion was taken under State control; so it is not rash to say that by 600[1] Eleusis was a part of the Athenian community. Thus this cult became the most important of Athens and gradually gained adherents all over Greece and flourished with Olympia and Delphi in Roman days.[2]

The shrine of Demeter at Eleusis was situated near the Bay of Salamis[3] and to it was invited the whole Pan-Hellenic world.

That the mysteries of Eleusis were of a Pan-Hellenic importance at this stage of its history is ascertained from an inscription 450 B.C. declaring a holy truce of three months for the performance of these rites.[4] Eventually, into this cult were received "the most distant nations"[5] including not only the men but even the women and also the slaves.

The chief offices of this cult remained hereditary in the family of the Kerykes and Eumpidae. From the fifth century on it was in complete con-

Organization of Eleusinian Cult.

trol of the Athenian State. The chief official was called the Hierophant, always of the family of Eumpolidae, who represented them to the State and headed the whole celebration. He granted admission to the candidates, revealed the 'orgies' and showed the things of mystery. So sacred was he that none dare address him by his personal name. He held office for life.[6]

Beside the hierophantes we find two hierophantides, female attendants. Their duty perhaps was to introduce and initiate female aspirants, but they

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1. Farnell, L. R., op. cit. p. 154
2. Fairbanks, A., op. cit., p. 129
3. Ibid., p. 139
4. Farnell, L. R., op. cit., p. 156
5. Willoughby, op. cit., p. 37
6. Farnell, L. R., op. cit., p. 168; Hastings E.R.E. Vol. IX, p. 78, and Fairbanks, A., op. cit., p. 79

were present thruout the whole ceremony and played some part in the initiation of the men, possibly setting the crown.[1]

The officers of the Kerkyes family were also appointed for life but they had no such jurisdiction as the other family possessed in questions of religious law, nor did they possess in the earlier period the important function of exegesis, tho in the later time they seem to have acquired it.[2]

Initiation ceremonies

The candidates assembled for the great step of voluntarily entering this cult. The preparation was begun at Agrae six months before the initiation proper. At the very beginning a warning was issued to the assembly by the priests that all unworthy and guilty of blood stain were to depart. It was necessary that all candidates should first be taken thru the 'lesser mysteries' at Agrae before they presumed to enter the 'greater mysteries' at Eleusis.[3] These lesser mysteries were of a public nature and were celebrated in February. Clement of Alexandria speaks of "the minor mysteries which have some foundation of instruction and of a preliminary preparation for what is to come after."[4]

Eleusinian rites were divided into four stages: the katharsis, or preliminary purification, the sustasis, or preparatory rites and sacrifices, the telete, i.e., the initiation proper, and finally the epopteia, or highest grade of initiation. For the first two stages we have much information because they were public, but of the last two we know very little because they were strictly private and the candidate was sworn to strictest secrecy concerning them.[5]

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1. Farnell, L. R., op. cit., p. 159
2. Ibid., p. 162
3. Fairbanks, A., op. cit., p. 131
4. Willoughby, op. cit., p. 43
5. Ibid., p. 43

The 'greater mysteries' began on September 13th, with a solemn assembly of the candidates in the Stoa Poicile to hear the solemn proclamation of the hierophant for the unworthy to depart. The next day the assembly heard the cry "To the sea, O Mystae!" Rushing into the sea the candidates purified themselves with the especially effective salt water. With them was also bathed by each candidate a pig which was later offered as a personal sacrifice and the blood sprinkled on themselves. This rite was believed to be more than cathartic, it was credited with regenerative powers, making the initiate in some sense a new being.[1]

After the purification candidates assembled for the solemn procession on the 19th of September to Eleusis. The distance was not great but a whole day was taken for this march, sacrifices being made to the numerous shrines and holy places along the way.[2] Enroute the procession passed over a bridge, at which time it was the custom for those following to heap curses and scurrilous language at the candidates. The object was to insure a safe crossing to the candidates by averting the evil eye, from the mystae in their blessed state, to themselves.[3]

On this march, strange to say and now unable to explain, was carried the god Iacchos instead of the male god of this cult, Kore. After this we however hear no more of Iacchos. This day is often spoken of as the 'exodus of Iacchos', and the whole ceremony sometimes called the 'Aldcades.'[4]

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1. Willoughby, op. cit., pp. 43-45
2. Ibid., p. 45
3. Farnell, L. R., op. cit., p. 172
4. Ibid., p. 172

This march took so much time that it was at night and in the glare of torches that the procession finally arrived at Eleusis. Here on the plain of Eharian took place the midnight revels. Here were places of sacred importance to the cult, "the Well of Vallichoros, where the first choral dance was organized by the women at Eleusis in honor of Demeter. Close at hand was the Unsmiling Rock, where the desolate mother sat when she first came to Eleusis. Not far away were the meadows which had seen her torchlight wanderings. It would not be strange if the mystae beginning their choral dances at the Well of Vallichoros, continuing their revel by torchlight in the meadows, resting at the Unsmiling Rock felt they were really sharing in the antique experiences of their goddess. Certainly in their wearied state, weakened by fasting, they would be peculiarly susceptible to such mystical emotions."[1]

After this part was completed the mystae were then prepared to enter the telesterion, or Initiation Hall where only the initiated were allowed.[2] From excavations made at Eleusis of the Telesterion and from comments made by various ancient writings we ascertain that most likely a religious drama was enacted here before the eyes of the initiates. It is evident that some sort of a religious drama or passion play in which the important parts of the myth of Demeter were

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1. Willoughby, op. cit., p. 46
2. Fairbanks, A., op. cit., p. 135. See diagram of telesterion and Hastings E.R.E. Vol. IX, p. 78

enacted before the eyes of the mystae gathered in the telesterion.[1] The archaeological remains of the Hall of Initiation at Eleusis bear out this theory . . . Clement of Alexandria tells us that "Deo (Demeter) and Koro became (the personages of) a mystic drama, and Eleusis with its dadouchos celebrates the wandering, the abduction and the sorrow."[2]

These plays were very simple; no stage machinery was used, only

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1. Farnell, L. R., op. cit., p. 173; Willoughby, op. cit., p. 48
2. Willoughby, op. cit., pp. 47-48.

mystic movements of the hierophant, sound of a gong, and unexpected sounds were sufficient to reproduce the effect on the expectant initiates. We can believe that darkness and then the sudden display of lights were also used to heighten the effect.[1]

After this the initiates partook of the sacred meal and water - drink known as the kukeon.[2] Clement of Alexandria gives to us the pass word of the Eleusinian Mysteries, "I have fasted, I have drunk the barley drink, I have taken things from the sacred chest, having tasted thereof I have placed them into the (Kathios) basket, and again from the (Kaithos) into the chest."[3] This might possibly mean a reference to some sort of a communion but, says Farnell, "if we keep strictly to the evidence, as we ought in such a case, we have no right to speak of a sacramental communion meal at Eleusis, to which.... the worshipers gathered."[4]

Following this sacred drink was a partial display of the sacred objects to the neophyte. After this state of initiation the initiates now attained the grade of <u>mystae</u>. The rest of the sacred objects were reserved for exhibition a year later at the <u>epopteia</u>, which was the final grade when the <u>mystae</u> became <u>epoptae</u>. Just what these sacred things or objects were we do not know exactly, but they have been supposed to be anything from wooden idols, phallic objects, to "cut cornstalk", mentioned by Hippolytus.[5]

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1. Farnell, L. R., op. cit., p. 179
2. Hastings, E.R.E., Vol. IX, p. 78
3. Farnell, op. cit., p. 185
4. Ibid., p. 195
5. Willoughby, op. cit., pp. 55-57

The Eleusinian Mysteries, like all the other mysteries in the Graeco-Roman world, werefounded on a myth, which is as follows. Persephone, daughter of Demeter "giver of goodly crops", while gathering flowers in a meadow was kidnapped by Pluto, king of Hades to be his bride. This was done with the knowledge and tacit approval of mighty Zeus himself. Then mother Demeter, hearing her daughter's cries, wandered over earth and water for nine days, torch in hand, searching wildly for Persephone. During this time of her sorrow she refused to be comforted and abstained from eating and drinking. She rested, in disguise of an old woman, by the "Maiden well of fragrant Eleusis". Here the daughter of the King, Celsus, found her and brought her to his father's house, where she broke her fast by eating refreshments. Demeter in her resentment against Zeus withheld the fertility of the soil so no crops grew for men, and thus no offerings were made to the gods. Zeus was now interested and arranged the restoration of Persephone by Pluto to her mother Demeter. But since the daughter had eaten a sweet pomegranate seed in the underworld, she was forced to return there regularly for a portion of each year. Eight out of the twelve months she passed on the green earth. During these months she was on earth crops were grown and harvested by man and gifts given to the gods. The Hymn closes with Demeter's joy at the restoration of her daughter Persephone. Demeter, in honor of this event instituted the Eleusinian Mysteries which gave to mortals the assurance of a happy future life. Such was the myth which stood in the background of thot for those who participated in the Eleusinian rites.[1]

Eleusinian Myth.

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1. Willoughby, op. cit., pp. 41-42; Case, op. cit., pp. 292-293; Fairbanks, op. cit., p. 135; and Hastings, E.R.E., Vol. IX, p. 78

The Rationale of the myth. This myth portrays a vivid picture of life and death in the nature world with its changing cycles. Nature is dead in winter, during which the goddess is absent. Vegetable life is dead, while Demeter, the giver of life, grieved for her daughter. But Spring brings release and triumph of life over death; Demeter rejoices in the return of her daughter.

Thus we have the connection of human life and death of the devotee with that of the goddess Demeter, who gives to all of her devotees a sure pledge of the triumph of life over death. The friendship of the goddess by initiation in this life, would give to them a certainty in winning blessings in the life after death. This was the ground on which flourished the Eleusinian hope.[1]

Summary of Eleusinian Mystery. This mystery in origin was a cult common to the Ionian tribes and probably borrowed from earlier races among whom they settled. Originally it was a cult of the powers which produced the harvest, and was conceived as a triad of divinities Pluto, Demeter and Kore; the goddess became so prominent that the god almost disappeared from view, and was replaced by a divinity Iacchus. Iacchus has no place in the original myth. He is used only on the march from Athens to Eleusis, after that no more mention is made of him.

The chief elements of Eleusinian mysteries were initiation, sacrifice and scenic representations of the great facts of natural and human life, of which the histories of the gods themselves were symbols. The basic idea

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1. Willoughby, op. cit., pp. 41-42; Case, op. cit., pp. 292-293; Hastings E.R.E., Vol. IX, p. 78; Fairbanks, op. cit., p. 135

of initiation was to purify the elements of the heart so the candidate might be acceptable to the divinity. At first these rites were confined to natives of Athens but later included all Greeks, Romans and eventually included women and slaves. The bar of entrance was not of birth but a moral one. Following the bath of purification was that of the sacrifice. On the plains at Eleusis great orgies took place after which the initiation, communion of sacred drink and the showing of sacred objects. In the telestron were probably enacted the important acts of the myth of the religion. It was a drama of human life for the initiates.

Death gave place to life to which the initiated entered after death. No dogmatic teachings were given, they witnessed only an acted parable. In it the initiate had personal communion with divine life and each got his own interpretation out of it. The aim of the whole matter was for the individual to become part of the deity so that the deity's victory would be vouched to him.

The Dionysian Movement

The Elesinian Mysteries had several rivals in Greece, among which was the Dionysian belief. Strictly speaking, it is not a cult but a movement. The fundamental principle in this belief was the same as in the Eleusinian mystery; namely, concern for future blessedness for the devotee and was produced by connection with a helping deity. This friendly rival was most vigorous, distinctive and widespread. Dionysus is a god from the half-barbarous Thrace. A god of vegetation in general and the vine in particular. He enter-

ed Greece three centuries after Alexander made his conquest of the Orient. He was god also of animal life. He was represented by various symbols of vine and animal forms such as a vine, grape cluster, goat, kid, bull. To procure rapport with the god much wine was drunk producing physical intoxication, which was the essence of Dionysian religion. The bacchanals, however, said it was spiritual ecstacy, the life and power of their god in them. They were entheos.[1] They also ate the flesh of living beasts in their frenzy. These savage features were toned down eventually in contact with the Greeks.

Women also were devotees of Dionysus; they carried out their worship at nights on Mount of Parnasus by the light of torches to the accompaniment of drums, flutes, cymbals. This religion gave freer play to the emotions than that of the old Hellenic gods, which accounted for much of its success.[2]

The Phrygian Great Mother.
(Cult of Cybele and Attis)

This Phrygian god and goddess occupy a prominent place within the religious syncretism of Hellenistic times. It came from Asia Minor and was the first Oriental religion adopted by the Romans. It came to Rome in time of distress and at the dictates of Sybil,[3] but it was not until the time of Augustus[4] and his successors that this religion really thrived at Rome. It operated as private brotherhood, tho in occasional instances was brought

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1. Case, op. cit., p. 297; Willoughby, op. cit., p. 68, pp. 71-75; Moore, op. cit., p. 440
2. Moore, op. cit., p. 440; Soper, op. cit., p. 113
3. Cumont, op. cit., p. 114 for discussion at this point
4. Case, op. cit., p. 304

under state patronage and supervision.[1]

Myth of Cybele and Attis

Ma or Cybele was the mother of all gods and men, the source of all life as well as the personification of all the powers of nature. Attis, a youth, is associated with her in some way, possibly as her husband.[2] The myth of this cult is variously given by different writers, but all embody the same essentials. Attis, beloved of Cybele, is killed either by himself or by another, in any case it is a violent death. If by suicide it is because he has been unfaithful; in his franzy he emasculates himself and dies. He dies under a pine tree and his blood causes violets to grow. He is mourned by Cybele who restores him to life; thus mortal Attis becomes deified and immortal.

Rationale of the myth.

The meaning of this myth is simple. Attis, the god of vegetation, is loved by Mother earth. The harvest and summer are followed by dead vegetation and the god Attis is restored to life.

Ritual of cult.

A pine tree is felled and the limbs are bound like a corpse. It is adorned with garlands and religious symbols among which is the statue of the goddess, then it is escorted to the sanctuary. This happens on March 15th. Then follows the mourning of Attis by the devotees and fasting for the day which is restricted to fruits, cereals, vegetables and wine.[3] This continued until March 24th when the mourning was at its height. It was known as the day of blood because in their frenzy, which was induced by crashing music and whirling dancing, they slashed themselves on the arms

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1. Willoughby, op. cit., p. 114
2. Cumont, op. cit., p. 48
3. Kennedy, H.A.A.A. St. Paul and the Mystery Religions, p. 90, furnish the material for these two paragraphs

with knives to imitate Cybele in their grief and to call Attis back to life. On this day some would emasculate themselves, which indicated that they became another Attis thereby. This was considered a sacrifice to Cybele and he thus became a member of the special cult called Callus (bridegroom to the goddess). The following day was one of delirious joy when the announcement was made that the resurrection of the god had occurred. This is well described by Firmicus Mater thus: "When they are satisfied with their fictitious grief, a light is brought in and the priest, having annointed the lips, whispers, 'Be of good cheer, you of the mystery. Your god is saved; for us also there shall be salvation from ills.'"[1] Then followed a day of rest and then a feast and the washing of the goddess in the Almo. Amid rejoicing the idol was brought back bedecked and taken into the temple.[2]

To this experience of the devotees the figure of a new birth may well be applied. In this annual festival they passed thru a religious experience so fundamental that it seemed to them the beginning of a new life, essentially different from the life they had known. This experience transformed them and gave them communion with their deity and assured them of personal immortality.

Connected with the worship of the Great Mother was the <u>taurobolium</u>. Its early origin is obscure but the purpose of it was the purification and regeneration of the individual. It is the most impressive of all Mystery rites. The initiate descended into a pit over which was a perforated platform. Onto this was led the sacred bull and slain, his blood dripping on

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1. Willoughby, op. cit., p. 127
2. Kennedy, op. cit., pp. 90-91; Moore, op. cit., p. 583; Case, op. cit., p. 304; Hastings E.R.E. Vol. IX, p. 80 furnished material for this paragraph

the candidate beneath. He allowed his entire body, ears, interior of mouth to be covered with the blood. When he came out of the pit he was considered having been baptised for his sins and 'born again for eternity.'[1] This act shows the really human craving for true enduring sotaria.

Cult of Isis

This cult came from Egypt; its chief deities were Isis, Osiris and later Serapis. This cult dealt with fertility of nature, the symbol being corn and thus its relation to the Eleusinian Mystery is traced.

Cult Myth. Once Osiris reigned on the earth as King of Egypt, teaching the people the arts of civilization, giving laws and showing them how to worship the gods. His wicked brother Set, or Typhon, killed him; his wife, Isis, mourning went in search for him. Thru magical rites conducted by Isis, her sister Neptys and the god Anibus, her son Horus and Toth, the emblamed body of Osiris was made alive. Henceforth he was ruler of the underworld and ruler of the dead. Here he judged the souls, assigned them their punishment or reward.

When this cult became Hellenized the god Osiris faded out and Serapis, a new divinity, took his place. The central place was then given to Isis. She dominated the cult just as the female deities in the other Mystery-Religions dominated them. The rites were very impressive and this made a great appeal to the people. The rites were both public and private; those public resembled a church service. Public festivals and pageants were held.

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1. Angus, op. cit., p. 94; Willoughby, op. cit., p. 131 furnished material for this paragraph.

The festival of November was very important for at that time the passion and resurrection of Osiris were enacted. The worshipers helped to act out the drama. Simulating the sorrowful search for Osiris by Isis the devotees beat their breasts and cried out with grief. When the god was found and arose there was great rejoicing.

The private rites connected with this cult fostered a very individualistic type of religious experience. A sort of monastic life was first led by the candidate and on receiving a sign from the goddess the initiatory ceremonies began. From the holy writings certain things were expounded, then followed baptism which was regarded as a regenerative rite that meant a new life. Then after ten days of strict chastity the initiate was led into the holy place of the temple to receive the initiation which was a ritual of death and resurrection. Life was now led in security under the deity and a guarantee of a happy immortality was vouched to him.[1]

The Cult of Iasura

In the eyes of the Latins this Dea Syria was corrupted into Iasura for popular use; the Greeks called her the "Syrian goddess." She was especially popular with the slaves and the great slave uprising in Sicily in 134 was led by a slave who claimed to be inspired by her. Under the Syrian Empire merchants became her missionaries. When Rome came into contact with this cult there was evidence that it had passed thru a period of syncretism.

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1. Willoughby, op. cit., pp. 169-194; Hastings E.R.E., Vol. IX, p. 75; Kennedy, op. cit., pp. 95-102; Case, op. cit., pp. 315-323; Cumont, op. cit., pp. 74-92.

An inscription in Britian shows this deity to be associated with Peace, Virtue, Ceres, Cybele and even with the sign of the Virgin. This religion was a redemptive religion, the deities were revered as the saviors of the individual man. Her rites were picturesque, sensuous, similar to those rites of the Great Mother's festival. In this wild frenzy the devotees sought a mystical experience to affiliate themselves with their pitiless goddess. This was their rebirth to a new life and immortality.[1]

Cult of Mithras

This is one of the strongest redemptive mystery religions; it made its way from Persia. It is of Indo-Iranian origin. Plutarch says this cult was brought to Rome by Sicilian pirates taken captive in 67 B.C. Its diffusion in Rome was largely the work of the army. Excavations show that wherever the Roman soldiers erected their camps there are found remains indicating Mithraic worship. Persian slaves employed by Romans also were missionaries of Mithras as well as Asiatic merchants who introduced it into Mediterranean ports and in all commercial cities. So powerful and widespread did this cult become that Cumont says, "Mithras seemed about to eclipse both the Oriental and Occidental rivals and to dominate Rome";[2] also quoting Renan on this point, "If Christianity had been checked in its growth by some deadly disease, the world would have become Mithraic."[3] Halliday, however, disagrees

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1. Cumont, op. cit., pp. 103-109 and 132-134; Willoughby, op. cit. pp. 30, 32, 124-125, 139-140.
2. Cumont, op. cit., p. 159
3. Ibid., p. 160

by saying, "It may be doubted whether at any time Mithraism was actually so important as for instance the worship of the Great Mother, with which it stood in close relation.... To suggest with Renan that there was ever any serious probability of Western civilization becoming Mithraic in the sense in which it became Christian is almost ludricrously unhistorical."[1]

Cult Myth — Mithras is "the god from the rock"; he contends with the sun and gets the better of him; an oath of eternal friendship is sworn between them and they are forever allies. The first creation of Ahura Mazda was a wild bull; this is captured in a tussle and dragged by Mithras into a cave. The bull escapes from the cave but is again captured by Mithras, who, grasping the animal's muzzle with his left hand, with his right, grasping a sword, cuts its throat and sheds the life-giving blood. Powers of evil send scorpions, ants and serpents to lap up this blood which is the cause of all life.

Rationale of Myth — This is a cosmological myth in which Mithras is a cult hero, an intermediary between god and man, a benefactor to whom men owe all good things. He represents the victory of man's struggle between light and darkness, good and evil. In mortal life Mithras stands beside the initiate as a divine helper. Like Helios and Mithras, the initiates are bound together as brothers in their sacred cause.

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1. Halliday, W. R., The Pagan Background of Early Christianity, p. 282

The initiates passed thru seven grades of initiation which were attained successively. The degrees are (1) the Raven, (2) the Hidden One, (3) Soldier, (4) Lion, (5) Persian, (6) the Sun, (7) the Father. The first three degrees are of a catechumenate. Only on reaching the rank of Leo was he admitted to full participation in the mysteries. This cult admitted only adult men.

The usual place of worship was often in caves, grottoes or subterranean crypts. The religious satisfaction held out in this cult to the volaries were: hope of blessed immortality and finally a righteous judgment. They were assured that in the struggle for life they would be successful. Their initiation was regarded as beginning a new existence. The preliminary tests, the simulated death, the purification of baptism, the feeding of the initiate with honey, and the participation in a sacramental meal, all stressed the idea of a rebirth to a new life.[1]

Summary We have seen that the religious situation in the Graeco-Roman world at this time of history was not destitute of religion but exactly the reverse. The people were tenaciously religious as Paul, who worked as a missionary in the Graeco-Roman world, testified. Probably at no other time in the history of mankind were all races and classes of men giving so much thot to religion.

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1. Cumont, op. cit., pp. 139-160; Halliday, op. cit., pp. 282-310; Hastings, E.R.E., Vol. VIII, pp. 752-757; Case, op. cit. pp. 312-314; Soper, op. cit., pp. 129-133; Moore, op. cit., p. 595; Willoughby, op. cit., pp. 143-168. These references furnished material for discussion of Mithras.

From our survey of the principal Mystery-Religions which flourished at this time we find there were certain common features. They were religions of symbolism; they gave satisfaction to those who sought escape; they satisfied the desire for knowledge of god; converts were brought close to their deity thru a sacramental drama; they were given assurance of blessedness in the life beyond; they considered their contact with deity a pledge of immortal life. Thru their baptisms of purification, taurobolium, sacred meal and drink they felt reborn into the life of their deity.

Significance of the Mystery-Religions for the Greece-Roman World

The government with which the first century Christians came into contact as citizens was a universal government. The genesis of this Politically political status had its beginning three centuries earlier when Philip of Macedon dreamed his dream of a Pan-Hellenism which he and his Son Alexander the Great were to bring close to a complete realization. As Philip looked upon Greece he saw the weakness of the city-state or polis. These chaotic and quarreling states were brought into unity thru force by Philip. Alexander "made of every race one man and became inaugurator of that comprehensive cosmopolitanism which reached its apogee in the Roman Empire."[1]

At about the same time that the Greek States were forming into unity we find Rome beginning to be aggressive for power and making efforts to dominate the West. The Romans repulsed the Greeks, built navies, and with

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1. Angus, S., The Mystery-Religions and Christianity, pp. 15-16.

the defeat of Hannibal, swiftly became masters in the West. The Romanization of the world was under way and the Hellinization of Rome was inevitable. From 200 B.C. to 150 A.D. Rome carried onward the dream of Alexander to a far greater consummation. The extent to which Rome extended her power over the then known world is graphically portrayed in colors and diagram of the Histomap.[1]

We have alluded to the political unit of ancient Greece, the polis or city state; this likewise was the political unit of Rome in early times.[2] For us this political unit has much importance, as its rise and downfall contained religious significance as well as political. This "the most wonderful and fruitful of the political experiments of ancient history"[3] had concentrated upon it the loyalty and aspirations of those who composed it.[4] To them it gave security of life and a meaning to religion, it commanded and received for its people a complete allegiance. The peoples' lives revolved around this political unit and gave a certain narrowness to the ancient life. All important acts both public and private, political and religious were bound up in the city-state. Each polis had its own patios, own divinities and its own worship differing a little from its neighbors.[5]

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1. The Histomap, published by Histomap, Inc., Chicago, Ill.
2. Fowler, W. W., art. Roman Religion, Hastings E.R.E. Vol. X, 820, 829-830
3. Angus, S., op. cit., p. 2
4. Murray, G., Fiver Stages of Greek Religion, p. 106
5. Sopor, op. cit., p. 109

The polis gave religion its life and form,[1] and was an advanced religious development in the life of the people Heretofore religion was centered in the worship of caves, mountain tops, springs; now with the establishment of the city-state branches of these religious cults were established in the cities.[2] The polis gave meaning to religion.

A change from hero-worship to state religions takes place with the institution of the polis. In hero worship the mortal ancestor or hero of the clan was worshiped. These may have been actual living men dimly remembered, some fictitious ancestor or faded deities; but all were imagined by the worshipers to have been once men or women on earth.[3]

With the program of colonization in new territories a change from the hero to state religions took place because they could not carry with them the tomb or the bones of the hero. State divinities were worshiped and these became the guardians of the family morality. This stimulated religion and while this religion was a living force it bound the people not to assert themselves against the state but to beget children as defenders of the state.[4]

Thus we see that the polis bound the people to it politically and religiously. But with the advent of political expansion and change in Greece and Rome, came the destruction of the polis, and the type of religion connected with it. "Devotion to the polis lost its reality when the polis with all that it represented of rights and laws and ideals of life lay at the

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1. Angus, S., op. cit., p. 13
2. Fairbanks, op. cit., p. 217
3. Farnell, L. R., art. Greek Religion, Vol. VI, pp. 404-405.
4. Ibid, p. 406

mercy of a military despot."[1] "The collapse of the wonderful city-state system of the Mediterranean world, dating in Greece intellectually from the rise of Sophism and politically from the Peloponnesian War, and in Rome from the second Punic War, brought with it the collapse of the religion of which it was the expression. The State religions of Greece and Rome suffered the fate of every religion which allies itself with a political system; they shared their glory in the halcyon days, and they shared their disaster in their disintegration."[2]

Politically we found narrowness and exclusiveness giving way to nationalism, internationalism, universalism. Man is now a part of the world, a new situation for him and one in which he finds himself lost without the support of clan and city-state. This change has caused him to lose faith in his ancestral gods of the city-state, because they were found not powerful enough to give him security and safety. Altho his faith was thus shattered, his religious instinct drove him elsewhere looking for religious support. Since politically he was not now bound to any definite system, he must unite himself with a god not bound to any definite political system. From the Orient came such cults to supply the desire and demand. They are the Mystery-Religions; they had in them the power of expansion and the germ of universalism.[3] They welcomed all who desired to be saved and who wanted security and certainty. The gods were savior-gods. Man was an individual and to the individual alone, irrespective of birth, did the Mysteries make their appeal. They were in-

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1. Murray, G., op. cit., p. 159
2. Angus, S., op. cit., p. 156
3. Ibid.

dividualistic religions, divorced from national concerns and into their fellowship were new members admitted irrespective of birth, race or social status.[1] They magnified his individuality by treating him as a man for his self-sake irrespective of political or social connections and endowed him with divine powers. In these cults slaves, masters, artisans and capitalists met as equals just as they did in the new world order. They offered him consolation and comfort in his distress and burden of the new world order; they offered a cathartic for his individual consciousness of the burden of sin and assured him forgiveness.[2] His god was universal.

Thus we see how significant were the Mystery-Religions for the political situation in the new world order of the Graeco-Roman world.

Social Significance

The political situation gives us an indication of the social situation at this time. In the polis-collapse his social security also disappeared and a man was left to himself to discover the disadvantages of his newly won freedom and pay the price for his individualism. The Graeco-Roman world meant far less to him than did the polis. It was too large and too far away to feel that it needed him or that it could help him.[3] He was broken from his traditional moorings; sometimes he was successful but more often defeated. He was dependent on his own initiative and effort. This left him to seek new helps and new securities appropriate to this new environment.[4] The great uneducated masses are spiritually less independent

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1. Angus, op. cit., p. 178
2. Ibid., pp. 185-187
3. Willoughby, op. cit., p. 355
4. Case, Social Origins of Christianity, p. 84

than the reflective, less able to bear life's disappointments, sense of defeat, burden of sin and guilt. So we find this group rising religiously and knocking at the doors of the ruling classes for religious security, which action could not be brooked. It needed more for its protection than the natural securities which society had thrown about him (man). Unable to cope with his new world in a cold social life, he turned to the authority of the supernatural.[1] "It was in the Mystery-Religions that the people of the Graeco-Roman world found satisfaction; to these they turned to obtain fulfillment of their desire. They furnished the realization of a personal attachment to the supernatural which the other religions, now powerless, could not and were unable to furnish. This personal attachment meant not only present union with a god who buoyed them up amid life's misfortune and their feeling of aloneness, but also gave them possession of a new kind of life that endured beyond time and insured bliss eternal.[2]

It was the will of the people that forced Rome to introduce the Magna Mater and it was the will of the people that brought in Isis-Serapis.[3]

Religious Significance. "Religion, like other phases of the Graeco-Roman life, felt the effect of these changed social conditions. For the masses of men former religious sanctions and guaranties no longer functioned. In the old, pre-imperial days the individual was well satisfied with the group

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1. Case, op. cit. Ibid., p. 82; and Angus, op. cit., p. 87
2. Case, Ibid., pp. 110-111
3. Angus, op. cit., pp. 161-162

guaranties.... so long as the gods protected the state and the state protected him he was well content. Successive conquests by foreign powers, however, rudely destroyed his complacency, and the victory of Macedonian and Roman arms wrecked the prestige of merely local deities."[1]

"When the emphasis of religion was tribal or national the individual felt certain of his salvation because of his birth."[2] But in line with the general social movements of the time, there was a distinct breakdown of traditional religion. The people did not become irreligious, but instead turned to religions of another type and sought satisfaction of a different variety. Men turned to satisfaction of personal desires and found it in the mystery group of religions, most of which came into the Graeco-Roman world from the Orient. Chief among the personal desires these cults had to offer was the privilege of a "new birth" for the individual. When the candidate was initiated into the cult he became a new-man. In old type of religion he felt certain of salvation because of his birth into his tribe, but now man desired immortality of soul as well as present welfare of body - an essential change of being was felt necessary, and this the Mystery-Religions guaranteed by means of initiatory rites. These cults answered the current demand for individualistic as opposed to racial guaranties in religion.[3]

Christianity in Graeco-Roman world as presented by Paul

We have surveyed the Mystery-Religions of the Graeco-Roman world. We have reviewed the significance of the Mystery-Religions in the Graeco-Roman world

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1. Willoughby, op. cit., p. 265
2. Case, op. cit., p. 114
3. Willoughby, op. cit., pp. 266-267

politically, socially and religiously. We now devote ourselves to this proposition: Was early Christianity in its development as represented in Paul in particular influenced by the Mystery-Religions? First we shall consider Christianity as presented by Paul.

Paul was born not far from the date of Jesus' birth, in Tarsus, in Cilicia.[1] He was of pure Jewish descent[2] and equally able to speak in Greek or Aramaic. His father was a Roman citizen and so the privileges of Roman citizenship were conferred upon him. He was trained a Jew at the feet of Gamaliel, one of the best rabbis of the day. He at first was a persecutor of the Christians[3] but after a remarkable experience was converted and became a disciple of Christ and began his great ministry proclaiming Christ.[4] Paul set himself the task of taking the Christian religion into the Mediterranean countries[5] which, we have seen, were places where the various Mystery-Religions flourished. In his argument and difference with the mother church at Jerusalem[6], two things of importance happened for the future good of Christianity. First, Paul was led definitely to devote himself to Gentile work, and second, the stamp of a universal religion was given Christianity by breaking it away from Judaism. It is in the development of this Gentile mission that we find the growth of Christianity from what it was in 35 A.D. in Jerusalem to what it became

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1. Acts 21:39
2. Phil. 3:5
3. Acts 9:1
4. Acts 9:3-22
5. Acts Chapters 13-28
6. Acts 15:1-30; Gal. 2:1-21

in the Graeco-Roman world in 100 A.D. In the world in which Paul preached the environment, both intellectually and spiritually, was predominantly Greek.[1] Since Paul was a man of his day and associated mostly in his mission with the Gentiles, we will not be surprised if we find him in some way influenced by his environment. That there is a difference in the Christianity presented by Paul from that of Jesus we can see thru a brief presentation of his teaching.

We shall first take his presentation of Christ and then that of the sacraments. Such references from his letters as Col. 1:17, Phil. 2:6, Phil. 3:21, I Cor. 16:23 are quite a different presentation from that given us by the teachings of Jesus of His Gospel.[2] Altho they may have a kinship with Greek philosophy in its Alexandrian form, as Gilbert[3] says, yet this in no way is an argument conclusive for their origin in the Mystery cults of his day. Passing on to Paul's teaching of Christ's work of redemption, we find that he teaches of a being who existed in the form of God, appeared of earth in likeness of sinful flesh, was crucified, and rose from the dead. Men, thru their relation to this experience of a celestial being, are redemmed. Put beside this the nucleus of the popular cults, as the cults of Attis, Osiris, and Adonis, which is in teaching - a

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1. Gilbert, G. H., Greek Thot in the New Testament, p. 40
2. Ibid., p. 67
3. Ibid.

divine being comes to earth, assumes human form, dies a violent death, rises, and thru union with him variously brought about men are redemmed. Since this teaching of Paul is without parallel either in Greek or Jewish writings, its analogies are to be found in Greek beliefs.[1]

Next we will consider Paul's teaching of the Christian sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Here, say some scholars, we surely do find the Mystery-Religions vitally influencing Christianity. First let us remember in a general way that to these matters Paul gives comparatively little space in his writings. "There are about a dozen verses regarding Baptism, and of his ten letters only one mentions the Lord's Supper, and that at no great length. When we remember that the age of sacraments was in its full vigor and prime, as Harnack says, it is not a little significant that Paul had so little to say about them. The fact suggests at least that his own religious life was not greatly dependent on sacred rites, whether thot to be magical or not. Even if it be true that in his view of the sacred rites of the early church he was most widely removed from the Gospel, it must be allowed that the importance which he attached to these rites, in comparison with his stress on faith, was in distinct contrast to the sacramentalism of his times."[2]

Whether Paul was a sacramentalist himself is a mooted question, but it is generally agreed that his presentation did lay the foundation for sacramentalism in the church later on. By example, nor in His teaching, nor

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1. Gilbert, Ibid., p. 71
2. Gilbert, op. cit. p. 74

his institutions, nor his orders, did Jesus make baptism a part of Christianity. He was against the sacramental view; the only conditions of acceptance with God of which he ever spoke were purely spiritual.[1]

Paul's attitude to Baptism is varied; in I Cor. 1:15-17, it is of little importance compared to preaching; in Rom. 6:3-6, Gal. 3:27, of vital importance. I Cor. 15:39 is regarded as Paul's belief in Baptism for the dead, and so in agreement with Orphic practice which practiced vicarious Baptism.[2] In Rom. 6:3 it is associated with the death of Christ; in Gal. 3:27 with "putting on" of Christ. These descriptions of the rite are "strikingly analogous to descriptions of initiations into pagan cults."[3] Rom. 6:8 and Rom. 6:5 speak of a dying and rising with Christ similar to the pagan initiation which involved the two thots of a death and a resurrection.[4] The most we can say is that his description of the rite is a striking analogy to the description of the initiation into the pagan cults. We may also say that there is a probability that the people who had been initiated into these cults may have taken Paul's description of Baptism as the description of a veritable sacrament, since he employed the same images with which initiation had made them familiar.

What Paul teaches concerning the Lord's Supper is (1) the cup is a communion of the blood of Christ and the bread a communion of

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1. Gilbert, op. cit., p. 75
2. Ibid., p. 75
3. Ibid., p. 76
4. Ibid., p. 77

the body of Christ (I Cor. 10:16); (2) "This is my body which is for you - do this in remembrance of me - this cup is the new covenant" - - (I Cor. 11:23-26); (3) unworthy eating of it (I Cor. 11:1). This is different from the statements of the words of Jesus (Mk. 14:22 and Mk. 14:24). Jesus gives here no command to repeat it, nothing of "in remembrance" of Him, no suggestion that He desired it ever to be a church sacrament; it is out of harmony with the spirituality of Jesus' teachings. Jesus gives no warning against any unworthy eating of sacrament. Thus we see there is a difference in Paul's presentation from that of Jesus.[1]

The conclusion drawn by some is that this difference of Christ's teaching, especially in the sacraments, as presented by Paul, from that of Jesus', was caused thru the influence of the Mystery-Religions. First let us examine the argument of analogy and see if that is valid. It has been seen that there is an analogy between Paul and the Mystery-Religions; does it, therefore, follow that Paul was influenced in his view of the Christian sacraments by the cults of the Mystery-Religions?

Argument from Analogy. The early Church Fathers noticed this analogy as well as modern writers, but "there are tricks of style used to give prominence to a similarity and to establish parallels strongly and closely. It would appear both were mistaken. Resemblance does not pre-

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1. Gilbert, op. cit., p. 79

suppose imitation and frequence of similarity of ideas and practices must be explained by a common origin, exclusive of any borrowing."[1] "To prove that Christianity is derived from these Mystery-Religions of redemption we must have much more definite and conducive evidence. Approaching these pagan doctrines solely upon the information from extant records, we find much of the charm with which they have been surrounded in the present day vanishing. The way in which they bestow immortality is solely thru magic; the high ethical element, of which Christianity is composed, is absent in them."[2] No one could maintain that because certain beliefs of Christians and pagans were similar, therefore they were identical, or derived from each other, or that the many factors of which they are composed are the same.[3]

In arguing from analogy there is danger of reading into the cults a greater definiteness and articulation than they really possessed, and it is certain that Paul cannot have known the Mystery-Religions in the form in which they ard known to us because for Paul they existed not in their fully developed form but in their uncompounded state.[4] Our conclusion on this point is that there does exist an analogy between Paul's conception of the Christian belief and that of the Mystery-Religions; this may show a probable influence of the symbolic rites of these cults on his form of the sacraments. We

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1. Cumont, op. cit., p. xviii
2. Schweitzer, Christianity and the Religions of the World, p. 24
3. Moore, C. H., Pagan Ideals of Immortality During Early Roman Empire, p. 48
4. Schweitzer, Paul and His Interpreters, p. 192

are unable, however, to see that these cults influenced Paul's conception of the Christian belief as to content.

Contrasting Pauline and Pagan Sacraments.

In contrasting and showing the difference of the sacraments according to Paul and according to the Mystery religions, we shall consider, first, the Lord's Supper and, secondly, Baptism.

Lord's Supper. The communion of the mysteries in which the pagan accomplished union finally with his god was "experimentally accomplished;" it was conceived as working ex opere operato. Not so with Paul; for him it is effected solely by faith in the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ and mediated by the spirit to the believer.[1] Originally pagan sacrament was conceived as eating the deity, but this had disappeared; so it is not possible to derive "communion with Christ" in Pauline belief or in John's millieu as an eating and drinking of flesh and blood of the Son of man from the Mystery-Religions of Paul's day. Paul believed that the atonement had been accomplished in quite a different way and so spoke of a covenant thru the death of Jesus.[2]

From figures of Sol and Mithras with bread and cup on a Mithraic monument in Rome, it has been argued this was the prototype of the Christian sacrament content. But this does not prove that Sol and Mithras were conceived as being present at the meal, and fur-

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1. Kennedy, H.A.A., Art. Mysteries, Christian, Hastings E.R.E. Vol. IX, p. 74
2. Clemen, op. cit., p. 257

thermore this development in Mithran religion came too late to furnish an aid toward the elucidation of the New Testament idea. There is only a distant resemblance between the two and only certain expressions employed in this connection are to be traced to pagan idea of union with the deity; the true doctrine of the Lord's Supper in the New Testament is independent of these influences.[1] The Mithras slaying of the bull has no connection with an atoning sacrifice but refers to creation and so there is no plausible cause for supposing the Mithraic mysteries influenced the Christian conception of the Lord's Supper, nor may it be derived even collaterally or by way of supplement from this cult.[2]

Paul knows nothing of eating and drinking of the blood and body of the Lord. . . he speaks only of eating and drinking the bread and cup. In I Cor. 10:16, 17 he does assume that communion is maintained and that it can be anmuled by unworthiness of man, but that the participant partakes of the body and blood of the Lord is not found in Paul; to attribute this to him is to do violence to his words. Paul, even as a Christian, stands absolutely for a transcendent Jewish con-

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1. Clemen, op. cit., pp. 260-261, 370
2. Ibid., pp. 262, 259

ception of God. Any relation to the nature cults on his part cannot be proved and ought not be assumed.[1]

Schweitzer agrees with and quotes Albert Eichorn[2] (The Lord's Supper in the New Testament, 1898, p. 31) who insists we have no knowledge of a "sacrificial meal" in the Mysteries which would serve as the model for the Lord's Supper.[3] So we conclude that up to the present no direct connection between the cultus meal of Paul and that of the Mystery-Religions has been shown; the only thing that has been shown with certainty is that in both cases there existed a cultus meal. Since these vital parts of the Mysteries are permanently hid we cannot say to what importance this cultus meal rose in paganism; nor can we definitely say that paganism had a communion in the Christian sense.[4] The only possible relation we can see is that "certain expressions employed in this connection by Paul are capable of being traced to the pagan idea of union with the deity; the true doctrine of the Lord's Supper is independent of these influences."[5]

Baptism Many religions have baptism or lustrations bound up with

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1. Schweitzer, Paul and His Interpreters, pp. 197-204
2. Ibid., p. 205
3. Ibid., p. 207
4. Ibid., p. 198
5. Clemen, op. cit., p. 370

them more or less, and so there is no significance here sufficient to make a connection with Paul and the Mysteries. Paganism has not the definiteness of the Christian 'bath or regeneration', nor is one baptised in the name of a Divine person, nor is there a special confession of faith in the Divine, nor is the gift of spirit represented as an immediate and inevitable consequence of baptism as is the case in Christianity. In paganism all this is either vague, implied or lacking. In Paul's thot new life is not by way of purification but by a different route that has nothing to do with the fundamental conception of purification, and, therefore, remains without analogy in the Mystery-Religion.[1] Paul asserts in the sixth chapter of Romans, that in baptism there is an experience of death and resurrection in fellowship with Christ. From this experience results a newness of life and a new ethic associated therewith. In the Mysteries there is nothing analogous to this dying and rising effected solely by the use of water. Some think this is found in the taurobolium, but not so; first, it is a blood baptism closely related to a sacrifice; the burial and rising are actually represented. So the significance is derived from the many-sided symbolism. There is no connection with this elaborate acting and the plain water of Paul. I Cor. 15:29 does not owe its origin to the Mysteries, because records show no practice of such a baptism for the dead in paganism. Thus we see a difference of the nature of sacramental conception and that Paul's doctrine is more 'mysterious' than that of the Mysteries; it is as if each had grown up in different soils.[2]

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1. Schweitzer, op. cit., pp. 207-209
2. Ibid., pp. 207-212

The most we can say about any relation here is that in general significance there is a common symbolism involved. In this sense baptism is a 'cleansing' and a 'consecration' and the feast established fellowship among partakers. But the assertions beyond this, i.e., dying and rising in Christ to a new ethical life, shows not the faintest connection with the outward significance of the rite. With Paul rites are secondary and can be removed yet the religion is not destroyed; but in the Mysteries the ceremonies themselves dominate thot and feeling and will, and if removed, the religion collapses.[1] Kennedy, who quotes Von Dobschutz on this matter, says, "the unique sacramental conception of the Early Church, which has no analogy in the history of religion because it belongs essentially to the Christian religion, has its origin solely in the Christian experience."[2] Kennedy concludes on this point by saying for himself, "it is vain to find points of contact.... the essential characteristics of Pauline religion were detached from ceremonial. The centrality of faith comes to be a criterion of every attempt at reconstructing Paul's spiritual platform. And here also we discover that there is no corresponding feature in the framework of the Mystery Religions."[3]

Nor in post-Pauline writings about the Christian sacraments is there anything borrowed in content from the Mystery-Religions of the Graeco-Roman world except possibly terms and modes of expressions."[4]

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1. Schweitzer, Ibid., pp. 212-215
2. Kennedy, St. Paul and the Mystery Religions, p. 256
3. Ibid., pp. 282-284
4. Clemen, op. cit., p. 371

Contrasting Mysticism of Mystery-Religions and Christianity of Paul.

"It should be at once noted that the mysticism of the cults was not of the intellectualized type that one discovers in the writings of Plutarch or Seneca, nor even of the refined, subjective sort that is evident in the Hermetic writings and in Philo. It was rather of a more realistic, objective, ecstatic, and highly emotional variety."[1] "The rites of religion, in order to be emotionally satisfying, had to partake of the same pictorial quality. They had to give actual and dramatic representation of the process they were intended to typify and induce. This the cults did."[2]

Also in Paul the foundation of his system is different; it has its foundation in the fact that it originally had its place in an eschatological world-view. He started with that of the early Christian church, which is essentially the eschatological expectation and then developed his doctrine. He shared with all those who preached the Gospel, the conviction that thru the death and resurrection of Jesus the proximate coming of the Messianic Kingdom with Jesus as its ruler was assured.[3]

Also Paul passes over entirely the expression 'rebirth' and deals with the new condition as an anticipated resurrection; in mys-

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1. Willoughby, op. cit., p. 274
2. Ibid., p. 279
3. Schweitzer, Mysticism of Paul the Apostle, p. 140

teries rebirth dominates. This is true of Mithras cult and Isis cult.[1] In Paul renewal is consistently only from fellowship with the risen Christ thru the resurrection. This is an important distinction. Also there is absent from Paul the idea of deification which is the desire and fond hope of initiates in the Mysteries. In Mithras and Isis he is even prayed to as a god.[2] Paul thinks realistically; for him the believer experiences the dying and rising in Christ in actual fact, not in any imitative sense. The individual does not become same as Christ but has fellowship with Christ and that is as far as Paul's thot goes.[3]

Hellenism unlike Paul's mysticism does not postulate any connection between predestination and mysticism. Every person can experience and become a divinity free from the world of necessity, but with Paul it is by predestination a necessity that some share the fate of the world while others thru Christ become participants of future glory. Again, in Hellenism the believer lives in the store of experiences acquired in initiation, while in Paul his whole being from baptism onward is a constantly renewed experience. Paul makes no use of symbolism, for him baptism is not a being buried and rising, just because the baptised plunges beneath the water and rises, but because it takes place in the name of Christ who was buried and arose. So for Paul, the solemn symbolism and preparation of Mysteries is wholly lacking. Paul brings baptism and the Lord's Supper into con-

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1. Willoughby, op. cit., pp. 13-14
2. Ibid., p. 15
3. Schweitzer, Mysticism of Paul the Apostle, p. 16

nection with Christ-mysticism, and finds explanation of them therein. This shows that for him sacraments are merely traditional, standing outside his thot, but form no part of his faith. Sacraments are conditioned not directly communicating eternal life, they are ephemeral institutions.[1] There is this difference in the scope of the sacraments; for Paul the sacraments have their beginning in the death of Jesus, immediate, present, and continue until His return in glory, immediate future, and only exist for this span. In the Mysteries, sacraments reach back into a mysterious past and for all generations of all mankind. Thus the mysticism of Paul is historico-cosmic, that of Mysteries is mythical. Again Paul's mysticism is collectivistic, that of the cults purely individualistic; the former, a passive character, the latter an active character. In the Mysteries the initiate acquires immortality on his death; in Pauline mysticism concern is with the passing away and restoration of the world and fate of the Elect amid these events. Finally, Paul is not wholly and solely a mystic; he allows non-mystical views of redemption to have like place. Paul has three facets of redemption - eschatological, juridical and the mystical; all go side by side. The exoteric and esoteric go hand in hand, because for him mysticism is combined with a non-mystical conception of the world.[2]

Summary and Conclusion.

The Mystery-Religions, mainly of Oriental origin, entered the Graeco-Roman world at a time of great po-

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1. Schweitzer, Mysticism of Paul the Apostle, pp. 16-22
2. Ibid., pp. 22-25

litical upheaval and met the individualistic and universal need in man when his political and religious mother, the polis, collapsed. Thru many initiations these cults promised to bring the candidate into personal union with the deity. Thru personal-acting-out-of-the-cult-myth of the deith the initiate emotionally and ecstatically engaged in the rites of baptism and cultus meal; finally accomplishing the coveted personal union with the deity. The Mysteries claimed to meet this popular demand and so made a world-wide appeal.

We have seen the significance of these Mystery-Religions for the Graeco-Roman world, politically, socially and religiously. In the political fall of his city-state, man was without a political unit or a religion since both were combined in it. With this event he found himself an individual in a universal field; it was here that the Mysteries ministered to him effectively. Socially his old unit was destroyed, the world had become unfriendly and took no account of him; but the Mysteries were interested in him and in their organizations he found all his brothers and sisters and was on equal footing with them. Religiously his old god of the polis died and lost worth with its collapse. He needed a deity who had a world, universal appeal, one in whom he could have confidence. His deity must be one who can give him assurance not only in these uncertain times of the present, but of the future. All this desire and promise was extended by the popular Mysteries of the day and so supplied his need completely.

Did these mighty Mystery-Religions cause Christianity of the first century to be influenced other than in the use of possible terms and modes of expression; that is, in content of beliefs? Some say yes, without a doubt, and even go the extent to say that Christianity has very little originality in

it at all. We have surveyed briefly Paul's presentation of Christianity and seen that it does differ from what was preached and taught by Jesus. Is this difference due to the Mystery-Religions we next investigated. The greatest similarities, we found, were in the sacraments. We found there were points of analogy but we could not prove, on this ground, any influence of the Mysteries on Christianity. In this method of argument we are in danger of reading greater definiteness and articulation into the cults than they really possessed, giving them a form which was unknown in Paul's time. Resemblances do not presuppose imitation, and frequency of similarity of ideas and practice must not always be explained by a common origin. To further prove our theory that Christianity was not influenced in its essence by the Mysteries we contrasted the doctrine of the sacraments of Paul and paganism. We found a great difference. (1) Paul knows nothing of eating and drinking the god as does the pagan cults. (2) The rite for the mysteries works ex operoperato, with Paul solely by faith in the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ and mediated by the Spirit to the believer. (3) The sacrament of Mithraic cult developed too late to aid in influencing the New Testament on this matter.

The most we could say in this regard is that there is a resemblance between the two, mainly in certain expressions employed; other than this there is neither a direct nor indirect connection between the cultus meal of Paul and that of the Mystery-Religions.

In our study of baptism we found (1) all religions had

some sort of similar rite and so no significance could be attached to the fact that both Christianity and the Mystery-Religions had this rite. (2) In Christianity we had a definiteness in its rite which was lacking in paganism. A definite profession was made by the Christian, and he was baptised 'in the name of' which was not so done in the Mysteries, when taking the facts from extant records. (3) For Paul rites are secondary and can be dispensed with, yet the religion holds. For paganism the rites are everything and eliminating them the religion collapses. (4) Paul's conception of purification is thru an experience of the death, resurrection and fellowship with Christ; no analogy to this is found in the Mysteries. (5) For Paul it is effected solely by plain water and belief; with Mysteries it is elaborate action - blood baths in which the participant acts out the symbolism. The most we can say is that in general significance, there is a common symbolism involved. Paul's spiritual platform is built entirely on faith; here there is no corresponding feature in the Mystery-Religions and so it is vain to attempt to find points of contact. The unique sacramental conceptions of the early church have no analogy in the history of religions because it belongs essentially to the Christian religions.

We believe we have further proved our contention by contrasting the mysticism of early Christianity as represented by Paul and that of the Mystery-Religions. Here we found many points in which they differed so as to establish no point of similarity whatsoever, thereby proving that influences from the Mysteries were nil. (1) The mysticism of paganism was of

a pictorial quality which had to be dramatized; Paul's was heart belief. (2) That of Mysteries was being-in-god mysticism, that of Paul being-in-Christ. (3) Paul does not use 're-birth' as do the Mysteries, but resurrection and fellowship with Christ. (4) No idea of deification of the believer is to be found in Paul as in the hope of initiates in Mysteries. (5) For Paul symbolism and preparation of the Mysteries is wholly lacking. (6) Difference in scope. For Paul, sacraments have their beginning in death of Jesus and continue until He came in glory; with the Mysteries they reach back into past and are for all generations of all mankind. Paul's is historico-cosmic; the Mysteries is mythical.

When we compare the sacred literature of these two religions we find that in the Mysteries the savior-gods are mythical characters and the stories are crude, fantastic and often objectionable. In Christianity we have a historic-savior; the literature is ethical, moral and spiritual. In Christianity it is the Holy Spirit that is the acting agency in man and not ecstatic and emotional experiences. The high ethical and spiritual demand of Christianity upon the devotee is far superior to that of the religion of the Mystery cults.

Again we must remember that between these two religions there was no compromise. Christianity was the bitter foe of the Mystery-Religions. It is not then probable that Christianity would copy from its mortal enemy.

So the most we can say for the influence of the Mystery-

Religions on Christianity is that a set of religious terms and a preparing thot of a saviour-god, may be attributed to the cults. We cannot find early Christianity, during its formation, being debtor to ideas or doctrines or essence of the Mystery-Religions. Christianity in her doctrine and essence is uniquely distinct and different from the religious doctrines and practices of the Mystery-Religions.

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